



Thursday, May 14, 2015

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Nordstrom called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 6:00 PM in the City Council Chambers of the Bloomington Civic Plaza.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Spiess; Nordstrom; Goodrum; Bennett; Willette

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Batterson and Fischer

STAFF PRESENT: Glen Markegard, Jason Schmidt, Elizabeth Heyman, Debbie Smith

ITEM 1

6:03 p.m.

APPLICANT: City Of Bloomington

REQUEST: City Code Amendments - Residential Phase II Ordinance

DISCUSSION AND COMMENTS:

Schmidt presented the staff report on the Residential Phase II Standards. Staff is requesting input on five key issues:

Minimum Floor Area

Multiple Family design and performance standards

- Minimum setback along streets
- Required storage space outside units

Manufactured home park

- Minimum site size
- Density requirements

Minimum Floor Area

Schmidt stated there is an interest and movement for smaller residential houses and apartments across the country. A potential change is to reduce the minimum floor area for various types of units. Rationale is the market is changing and lifestyles are evolving. Reducing the minimum floor area allows developers to respond to the market trends and address local needs for affordable housing in the City of Bloomington. Staff presented the current square footage requirements and examples of houses and apartments with various square footages.

Markegard discussed an SRO (Single Room Occupancy) Project he visited recently in Redmond, WA and mentioned that the market may desire a similar project in Bloomington in the future. The project provides dorm like living with eight units tied to one kitchen, and a common area. The project provides an affordable housing option at a density of 384 units per acre. Despite no public subsidy, it is 100% affordable and LEED Platinum. In comparison, the City of Bloomington's most dense residential development is at 106 units per acre.

Spiess, who also attended the same tour, commented that it was a beautiful building and the dynamic community fit the needs of a wide variety of people. She stated there have been no problems with crime and the residents were getting along. The project was very innovative and well done.

Nordstrom questioned the specific demographics and life styles targeted. Spiess stated the development is not really targeted to any one group. She believes it appeals to wide variety of people from Microsoft executives, students and artists. Markegard said the property manager said there were several higher income tenants that simply wanted less space and to simplify their life. He also said there were tenants that were out of town a lot due to work travel or having a second dwelling.

Goodrum asked if these rentals fit the tenants' needs now and may not fit their needs forever. Markegard stated average stay was around fourteen (14) months. Bennett questioned the occupancy rate. Markegard stated the development was fully leased but had no waiting list.

Markegard added that the development concept works well under good management, but if it goes bad, he envisions the development could slide very quickly and become a problem.

Goodrum stated based on Seattle's cost of living rate this type of development is in demand. Demand in Bloomington for this type of development is not here yet.

Schmidt presented the top 10 populated metro cities minimum floor area requirements for comparison. Willette questioned if this been discussed in the other cities. Schmidt stated the staff from the others cities were interested in the data collected.

Schmidt asked the Commission if the City should maintain a minimum floor area or allow the building code and market to dictate the minimum unit size and if the City maintains a minimum floor area, should the sizes be lowered?

Spiess stated the market should drive the minimum.

Goodrum prefers establishing minimums. A number of things could happen without a minimum. Small houses are fine like those in the staff report. Suggested a minimum of 500 square feet with efficiency units at 350 square feet.

Nordstrom questioned in the example from Redmond if the common areas count towards the square footage? Markegard stated the square footage is specific to the unit.

Goodrum stated the zoning districts would dictate where dense projects are located. Nowhere in Bloomington can the Redmond project locate at 360 units per acre.

Bennett questioned, as houses become smaller will we see requests for lower minimum lot sizes? Markegard stated amendments could be made to lower minimum lot sizes. Bloomington is built out, which makes it harder to create smaller lot sizes, but developers could potentially combine several single family lots to create small lot infill projects.

Bennett likes the idea of the market driving the sizes, but at the same time there is a need to be aware of abuse by developers. Agreed with Goodrum to set minimums, but having flexibility with common areas.

Structure Placement

Schmidt presented the staff report and posed the following policy questions. Should the City reduce the minimum setback along a street in the multi-family zoning districts? If yes, what should be the reduced minimum setback along the street? The current standard is a 40-foot minimum setback from the property line abutting a street. Reducing the setback gives the developer the option to place the structure closer to the street and shift parking to the side or rear.

Discussion occurred on right-of-way width and sidewalk concerns. Staff stated sidewalks are typically within an easement.

Goodrum is ok with a 25 foot setback for the front to maintain the character of the neighborhood.

Nordstrom, Spiess, Bennett are ok with a 25 foot minimum.

Storage Space Outside Units

Schmidt presented the staff report. Staff received comments from recent multiple-family residential developers within the City that the minimum size of the storage space required outside the units was too high. Developers stated that they were typically providing a central bike storage area within developments outside of Bloomington and installing smaller storage units.

Should City of Bloomington reduce lockable storage requirements outside the unit and to what size? Should it be reduced if there is a designated bike storage area?

Willette questioned what the maximum and minimum are today. Schmidt stated 175 cubic feet for a minimum and no maximum at this time. Markegard stated Bloomington does have a maximum on residential garage sizes, but not with regard to apartment storage areas.

Nordstrom questioned historically what has been the driver in the past 100 years for outside storage, bikes, bar-b-ques, etc. and how have needs changed over time? What are tenants looking for? Markegard stated there were no standards back in the 50's and 60's; most older apartments have no storage. The items stored likely have not changed significantly although the number of people per unit has dropped quite a bit. Goodrum questioned if other cities are waiting to see what we do. Schmidt stated at this time no.

Goodrum stated "buyer beware" if they are looking for storage space. He is comfortable with a lower minimum and agrees with 54 cubic feet where there is separate designated bike storage. It is nice to have some storage outside the unit.

Schmidt stated stored items tend to end up on the balcony if storage is not provided. Goodrum stated it all comes back to the aesthetics of the area.

Bennett stated if you reduce living area needs, additional designated storage space is needed. Also agrees if a designated area for bikes is provided, she is ok with smaller storage area. To encourage people to bike, there needs to be a designated bike area.

Spiess likes a lower standard for a dedicated bike area with a reduction to 54 cubic feet minimum.

Manufactured Home Park

Heyman presented the staff report. There are currently no existing local performance standards although State laws apply. There are two existing manufactured home parks built before the current State laws were in place. Staff is seeking input on minimum lot size and maximum density in R-1 zoning.

Minimum Lot Size

Nordstrom, Willette, Spiess, Goodrum and Bennett all agreed on requiring a minimum of five acres for new manufactured home parks.

Maximum Density in R-1 Area

Nordstrom, Willette, Spiess, Goodrum and Bennett all agreed on limiting manufactured home park density to ten units per acre.

Nordstrom questioned tornado bunkers; staff responded that they are required by State Statute for new manufactured home parks.